

Mortality

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Remilia learns the hard way that you can't always get what you want. An exploration of the Scarlet Devil Mansion residents and their struggles.

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The Confrontation

I found myself slumped against the table of my balcony, lazily staring at the melancholy, clouded night sky. God knows how long I had left myself in this unsightly position, doing nothing of worth. Instead I simply watched the dark storm clouds roll by, finding their repetitive nature as one of the few things that could soothe my wounds. The night was always one of the few things I could confide in.

It was hard to say how much time passed-I really didn't care. The ever-familiar gnaw of hunger I fought to rid myself of every night made its debut once again, but I found myself unphased by it. I felt the welcome test of blood tempt my lips, yet I still had no intent quenching that thirst, simply choosing to continue idly watching the sky. The nightly hunts were boring anyway, there was little entertainment to be had in being stuck with victims who will never fight back.

Perhaps it'd be for the best if I wasted away.

Hours past, and as I expected in the back of my head, I heard the light of footsteps of an uninvited guest. I had told her not come, but I knew well she'd be apathetic to that command, worrying herself silly over my wellbeing like she always does. This time, however, I wasn't sure how I would be able to face her. The horrible stew of feelings, upon seeing her shining, perfect silver hair, her ageless face, her eloquent dress..having to see such beauty knowing that...

You know it's an inevitable. Stop trying to hold on.

"I brought you the usual blood-tea, so you won't be famished tonight. I'll be out of your hair right away," Sakuya declared as she shakily set up the tea on the table, and almost instantly began making her way back into the mansion. I immediately took notice of the fact that her voice lacked the eloquence that usually rang through it, though I thought not to make note of it.

"Thanks," I declared feebly and informally. Perhaps knowing she'd likely get very little else out of me, the maid quickly went back on her way.

Yet, somehow, I simply couldn't stand the thought of not seeing her for the remainder of the long, cold night. It was silly, but something inside me just had to make everything harder. I mustered up what little strength and will I still had, and yet, it still came out as merely a plea.

"Sakuya, please stay."

The woman spun around almost immediately, and the dreary expression on her face seemed to partially leave. She seated herself across from me as always, waiting to be commanded to be speak as she usually did. I turned my attention away from the sky to the woman in front of me, taking in her features, her neutral yet optimistic expression... I wanted to take refuge in her beauty and her kindness, but everything inside of me wanted to cry over the inevitable grief instead.

What made you deserve someone who cared so much anyway?

The two of us sat there together for hours more. It became increasingly difficult to keep my feelings inside, as I felt fresh tears paint the front of my face. Eventually, I put my head down and just cried my eyes out, making myself look as pathetic as I could possibly manage to as I bawled my eyes out over seemingly nothing. I didn't care what anyone thought about me at that moment, I didn't have any capacity to.

It was then that I felt her cold, yet welcoming hands rub a tissue around my face, using her other arm to softly pull me into a hug against her chest. "Don't cry, mistress..." she uttered repeatedly, in the softest, most comforting voice the woman could possibly manage. I kept screaming and crying for god knows how long, yet she was perfectly patient for all of it.

She went back to her seat once my tantrum subsided, and I was able to form coherent sentences. Yet, her being so kind to me..It made something in me snap. I could never lose such a beautiful presence as a part of my life, I simply *had* to say it.

I began to speak up-a strained, feeble tone that was embarrassing in comparison to my usual grandeur, but it was simply the best I could do.

"Sakuya... please stay with me."

The maid missed the deeper implication of my words, clearly suppressing a slight confusion on her face. "I would never leave you, you know that," she said in an attempt at comfort.

I simply sighed, knowing she meant those words in full earnestly, but they simply weren't true as she didn't have a choice in the matter.

"No, Sakuya, I... I need you to stay with me. I couldn't handle you leaving in any capacity, it would destroy me. I love you too much to see you go." Though using the words of a demand, I simply ended up giving a her a strained, pathetic plea that would elicit sympathy from even the cruelest of tyrants.

For one of the few times I had been with her, I saw her frown. Her face was more distressed than I'd ever seen it, and it stung like a dagger to know I had hurt her so fast.

"Mistress, I... you know I cannot do such a thing."

"Do I?" I complained in vain. "We never discussed the possibility in great length. Why are you so opposed to the idea?" I cursed myself for raising my voice, knowing I had no intent to express malice towards her.

"Mistress, I... I..I simply can't."

"Why?!" I demanded, choking a sob and feeling tears start to stream off of my face again. "I can't... I can't... I can't lose you!" I choked out with strained gasps as I slammed my first my fist against the table, resuming my pathetic sobbing from earlier.

"I *need* you here!" I yelled frantically. "You can't just... die! I couldn't..I couldn't handle that! Don't you understand that?!"

Sakuya's voice took on more stern of a tone than I had ever heard, and I was immediately taken aback as she abandoned her usual submissiveness just for that moment. I felt myself shiver as her words stuck a knife through my heart, and futilely reminded me of how foolish I was being. "Mistress. I have no intent of abandoning what little humanity I've still clung to. If you cannot cope with that, that is your burden to bare, because I have no intent on changing that. "

My breathing stammered and I choked my words... I could barely speak. I felt my hands begin to clutch together, my mouth clamping, as I lost sense of any sort of rationality. I wanted to tell her she *had* to, tell her she had no choice because I was above her, but my mind was swarming with incomprehensible thoughts and feelings, and I knew a part of me deep inside held me back from being so horrible.

Instead, I pawed through different phrases and thoughts in the goal of not making a fool of myself, but whatever preparation I did, it..wasn't enough.

"Sakuya..is it really such a painful experience to be with me that having an escape appeals to you? Is death comforting to you as an eventual escape?" I in no way had the energy to give one of my usual grandiose speeches, but the words hurt just as much as they always would.

I'm such an idiot.

Tears splashed in her eyes, and she noticeably struggled to suppress her voice breaking.

"M..mistress... you know that's not true, I just.."

"Then why won't you stay with me?"

"Why don't you... why don't you understand you just..can't always get what you want?!"

I just looked at her. Never would I have expected the woman who spent so long kissing the ground I walk on to say such things to me, leaving me unbelievably shocked and bewildered.

Following up, she gave me a somber chuckle-the most expressive I had ever seen her up to that point. "It's not really about 'love' is it? You're simply worried about not having someone to do all of you're chores anymore, aren't you? Have you become so sedentary that the thought terrifies you?"

My hands shook, it was so bewildering to see her behave this way that I couldn't help but have to shake away the idea that this was all a particularly frightening nightmare. Every little bit of rationale I had was drained by such incredibly strong words, and all I could think to do was to stand my ground.

"You never complained about it before, did you?! You could've left anytime you wanted, I wouldn't *want* you here if you didn't want to be here!"

"You *know* there's no truth to that, Remilia! You would've sucked me dry and thrown me in a ditch the moment I told you I don't want to do this anymore!"

I slammed my fist on the table, damaging the glass, as my voice seemed to finally regain the energy I was known for. "Is that what you think of me?! That I care that little about everyone around me?!"

"If the shoe fits, mistress."

" I DIDN'T HAVE TO SPARE YOUR LIFE! "

She went dead silent.

Her eyelids lowered and she returned to her usual neutral expression.

After an agonizing period that felt like years, she finally spoke up once again. Her voice had returned to it's usual cold, unbiased tone, but instead of being comforting, it sent shivers through my spine.

"If I am allowed to leave, I will leave. Goodbye, mistress."

"Fine! GO! I'll be just fine by myself!" I shouted angrily as she turned around and walked out the door, as calmly and gracefully as ever.

"You're probably better off..." I mumbled under my breathe, long after she was out the door.

And just like that, she's gone.

What a worthless waste of life you are. You know you wish she won that fight.

Running Away

I stomped through the grass, mustering all of my strength to not twist my head and look back at what I was leaving behind. I kept my head down and focused my eyes on the musky grass in front of me, making sure to keep my thoughts in check as best as I could. The intimidating thunder making its presence known and the mysterious animals chattering in the night did little to wrack my nerves, as I stayed true to my intentions.

Just keep moving. It doesn't matter.

Once I was substantially away from my... former mistress's property, I decided to stand still and take in my surroundings. The sky was black all but for the looming threat of dreary storm clouds, and the ever-present fog of Misty Lake was much more difficult to navigate without the assistance of the sun. It dawned on me how foolish this was; where the hell am I to go in the middle of the night? It's no secret that Gensokyo is at its most dangerous at night, what with the beasts on the prowl in search of a meal. I know I'd survive such an encounter, (the youkai still feasting on humans are often the most incompetent,) but it wasn't something I wanted to deal with either way.

The humans of the nearby village were no better-deciding me a freak for my powers and other odd features since the day I arrived, I'm sure they'd be quick to light their torches if I went to them for assistance. It was ironic that I criticized my mistress so much for my lack of independence, realizing I myself really had no place to go if I'm left alone. Would it really be possible to live a life of my own if I wanted to?

Alas, it was not the time for such thoughts. I simply trudged through the mist and blind darkness, knowing I had to find shelter *eventually*. After electing to be involved in several incidents, I had made a

decent picture of Gesokyo, but spending so much of my time in the mansion meant I had few relationships with most of its residents.

Where was I going, anyway? It was getting harder and harder to see. I must've looked like a fool waddling around in the darkness with no particularly direction in mind. Of course, as if things couldn't get any worse, I began to feel the tinge of water splash against my shoulders.

Of course I had to leave right before an oncoming storm. It wasn't very long before I was being assaulted by the tears of the sky, and had no perceivable way of finding shelter from it.

Frustrated, I simply sat on the ground and hugged my legs, having little mind to continue my search. I didn't really care for trying to prevent getting drenched anymore, I merely curled up in a ball and contemplated what had happened to me as the water ran down my face. The simple truth was, I had no true place in this world I spent the better part of my life in. I was correct in saying I never truly had a choice, but it was not because of any perceived consequence. It was because I didn't stop to consider if I'd be able to handle the fall after I cut the ropes.

It took a lot of strength to not simply run back to my former home, climb into my warm bed, and go back to acting as meek as used to, as if nothing ever happened. Of course, I knew if I walked back now I'd look like a child running away from home. Laying in the rain like a clueless idiot was more than enough humiliation for me.

The gods must have been frowning on me that night, as I began to hear..whispering.

Faint, mischievous whispering-and maybe a hint of giggling.

Having my concerns validated, I rolled backwards and held the coldness of one of my many knives in my hand as tight as I could, standing up and correcting my position of defeat into something more respectable. I knew little would come of it, but I didn't see fit to

look so vulnerable in front of an oncoming threat. Lifting my chest, making my face stern and holding my knife in front of me, I challenged the darkness.

"It would be best if you relented. I have no time for this."

The voice did not silence, meaning intimidation would not make this any easier. Like many of these people at their worst, it seemed they were starved beyond any reason. The whispering to no one in particular continued and seemed to get closer and closer to me, their identity protected by a thick, unrelenting layer of darkness. I stood my ground, not to be intimidated by someone so weak and feral, but an inkling of fear lingered in my mind, wondering if they'd hurt me using the advantage of darkness alone.

Yet, the being decided to not even show their face before sending a cluster of bright red bullets my way, providing the only illumination to the night air. I ducked and attempted to make out the figure in the darkness, but had no such luck even as I continued to dodge such bright bullets. Not intending to dedicate my energy to a rather a petty fight like this, I sent back a circle of knives surrounded by shining blue bullets, hoping that'd be enough to scare them away if I wasn't lucky enough to hit them.

Strangely, I heard..strained breathing, as if having a response made them reluctant. Nonetheless, another cluster of bullets came my way, this time scattered in different directions and failing to target me. Exhausted and tired of these games, I held one of my few important possessions, my silver stopwatch in my hand and froze the world in front of me. Using their futile bullets as a makeshift light, I charged forward and finally caught sight of my foe's appearance, letting time resume to hold them in front of me.

What I saw could not invoke disdain in me, but an incredible sense of pity. The poor creature wore a small white dress, torn on several ends and covered in blatant stains I could make out even in the darkness. Their hair was unwoven, overgrown and ratted, with grease and sweat noticeably flowing through it to even an untrained

eye. They whimpered loudly and was clearly holding back from screaming, their wide, childish eyes silently begging for mercy.

I simply sighed. I had expected whatever foe I'd encounter at a time like this to be a pitiable case, but not like this.

I lowered my voice to one of sympathy, feeling for them too much to frighten them any more. "If I may ask, why did you choose to attack me?"

Trembling, they clearly had to muster up all of their strength to speak. "Well, I, um... I've been really hungry and... I... I didn't know you were from here!"

A forgivable mistake, I supposed. I hadn't made any sort of strong enough impact to be recognized in complete darkness. Seeing no need to scare the shriveling mess any longer, I dropped them back onto the ground. The last I heard of them was the pitter-patter of their feet scurrying away.

I sighed and simply trudged towards the nearest tree, resigning to sleeping in the rain as I knew it was an inevitable. Slumping against the wet bark, for some reason the image of a poor, lonely youkai doing despicable things out of what little survival instinct they clung to stuck in my mind.

Sometimes, you find a kindred spirit in the most unexpected of places.

Empty

Against the night sky, I struggled to keep flying, mustering every ounce of energy I could to not pass out. Out of the corner of my eye I could tell the sun was beginning to rise, meaning I had miniscule time to shelter me and my sister from the sun. I struggled not to notice the charred wood in the side of my vision as gently caressed my sister's head, all the while struggling to make out any viable hiding place.

Becoming more desperate as I felt the poor soul shake in my arms, I noticed a building that, while similarly damaged, managed to lack any openings. It made me sick to my stomach to have to expose my impressionable little sister to such destruction, but I knew I truly had no choice. Gliding directly into the door, I gradually let myself touch the ground again.

Letting myself relax ever slightly more, I let Flandre walk on her own again. "Now, I promise... one stay in this shack and I'll have you in a new, even comfier place tomorrow." I looked around and sighed distantly, knowing I was giving her quite the big sell. Ashes covered the floor, rotten food tainted both of the once elegant couches, and worst of all, the stairs seemed to have collapsed across the living room, blocking off whatever remained of the kitchen entirely.

"Big sis, I'm... I'm so scared."

"I know you are, Flandre, I am too... but such mighty beings like us should never succumb to fear. I guarantee every last scoundrel who saw fit to leave us in such a state will eventually rue this day!" I had tried to keep calm for the sake of my sister, but I could feel my hands burning and curling into fists, my heart pumping...

"C..can you please not talk like that big sis.."

I exhaled, and tried desperately to keep myself together. "I'm... sorry, Flandre. I mean it, we'll be back on top in no time..you mustn't fret..." Trying to repress the horrible shaking in my hands, I pulled off as much of the garbage I could off of the least ruined couch, and placed a blanket over it to hide the grime the best I could. "You can rest right here, sister..It'll only be for today, I promise."

Laying her head on the end of the couch, I could tell by her eyes she was trying very hard not to cry. I couldn't help but feel my fists shake even harder at the sight.

"You... you don't have to be sad, Flandre. You know I'm going to fix this."

"I..don't know that, big sister..."

"Don't you..have that faith in me?" I pleaded. "I've fought off entire armies, feasted on the most aggressive and persistent of vampire hunters, burned down churches that sought to be rid of me! I'm *the* Scarlet Devil for god's sake, what makes you think I'll give up now?!" My face burning, my hands clamping together and a nasty feeling welling up in the pit of my stomach, it took what little self control I still had to not merely devolve into a fit of screaming. Forgetting about trying to keep myself stable, I fanatically kicked and stomped the ashes, covering myself in them and making myself look like a deranged lunatic. "This was *my* land! MY EMPIRE! NONE OF THIS IS FAIR! **NONE OF THIS IS FAIR!**" ITS NOT FAIR IT'S NOT FAIR IT'S NOT FAIR!"

I continued screeching it over and over again as I continued to worsen the condition of my clothes, beating whatever sort of ruined, tarnished property I could get in my trembling hands.

That is, until I saw the fear in my sister's eyes, when I...

"Please wake up, Remi. This is ridiculous."

My eyes slowly creaked open, my vision blurry and confused. I was immediately met with the smell of.. old books? Wine? This clearly didn't seem to be my room... and oh god, did I have such a blistering headache. Groggily looking down, I saw myself sloppily spread across a fancy red couch, with fresh wine stains decorating the pillows.

"Where the hell am I.." I complained to no one in particular, probably making myself look like an oblivious fool.

In front of me was a maze of bookshelves, serving as a backdrop to an array of fancy furniture. I glanced over and saw Patchouli in her usual purple garb, sporting bloodshot eyes and looking fairly annoyed. She sat down next to me and exhaled, tapping her hands on a thick book in her lap. "I suppose you're wondering what happened last night, yes?"

"Uh, yeah I-hic-am..why do I feel like crap Patchy?"

"Well," she sighed, "You barged into my room, downed half of my wine and vomited all over the floor, screeching about 'that damn maid' all the while. It was... quite a sight, to say the least."

It was..immediately sobering to be reminded of what brought me there. I rubbed my widening eyes, feeling an immediate pang of distress in the center of my chest. I tried my best to heave myself up and sit in a more respectable position, but anything I could manage still ended up looking rather pathetic and pitiful, unable to hide the flurry of emotions I was feeling.

I looked Patchouli in the eyes and my voice softened, tears leaking from the brims of my eyes. "Patchouli, is..is she really gone?"

"Please, I'm sure she'll come back. I doubt could she could ever leave you forever."

I simply let my head sink into my lap, not having the energy for one of my usual fits. I thought back to all the disgusting things I said, the

awful, immature words that spewed out of my mouth..but worst of all, her words rang in my head on repeat, and stung just as much as they did that night.

"You just want someone to do your chores," I muttered bitterly. "Why can't you understand you can't always get what you want," I repeated. "It's not really about love, is it?"

I felt Patchouli softly place one of her hands on my shoulder. "Remi, you know she didn't mean any of those things. We all act irrationally when we're upset."

"Really?" I challenged, covering my face with my arms more and more. "What makes you think she wasn't simply silently resenting me the whole time, waiting for an opportunity to strike all the while?"

"You..shouldn't doubt yourself so much, Remilia. You know who she is."

"I'm... I'm not sure who / am sometimes, Patchouli."

Patchy's eyelids lowered as she somberly looked down at her book, seemingly stopping to consider what exactly to say. I stared at her anxiously, instantly wondering whether I had somehow already done something to hurt her. I did my best to hide it, but I couldn't help but silently beg her to say something, *anything*. Yet, somehow, I dreaded whatever was to come out of her mouth all the same.

Her voice became strained and softened, but she did finally speak up. "Remilia, I... what *happened* to you?"

"What..what do you mean?"

"I miss you. When I met you, you... you were so extravagant and lively, unlike anybody I'd ever seen. When you looked me in the eyes, I saw a confidence that made any doubt I had seem petty and warranted. Being next to someone so strong, so *powerful*, I... you

know I'm not an excitable person, but being with you brought out a joy in my life I had never had."

"Patchouli, I..."

Her voice seemed to strain a bit. "Remilia, I..when you held me like I was the most precious thing in the world, when you got your lipstick all over my face... I, I felt like I for the first time I had somewhere I belonged. I want..I want to see you smile like that again, Remi."

I sighed. "Patchouli, you... you really don't have to glorify it so much. I was a power hungry tyrant, you have no idea how many people would like to have my head. It probably would've been for the best! Some jackass stabs me with their yardsale stake, and declares themselves a hero."

"I..I don't care if you're satan himself, Remilia. I still think you deserve to happy."

"For what, Patchy? What makes me deserve to *live*, so much as achieve some sort of happy ending?"

The librarian hesitated just a bit. "You... this whole time, I thought you were so depressed because you longed to return to that lifestyle. But now I realize... you've become so miserable because you're remorseful, aren't you?"

I clung to myself tighter. "Shut up! You're just speaking nonsense. You know I would never."

"I would have thought, at one time. But... I can see it in your eyes, being in such a humble position transformed you. More than ever..you can't only think about yourself, and that tears you up tears you up inside every time you hurt someone. And you're so distressed now because you love that maid with all your heart, just like you love me."

"Why are you saying this to me?!" I cried. "Are you trying to mock me for being weak?!"

Of course, just when I thought she was going to spit in my face for going soft, the woman placed her hand on top of mine and gripped it. "You're not the monster you think you are, Remilia.

I stared into her eyes. I felt so safe, so warm, knowing she had so much patience for me despite everything. I knew I could hold her hand as long as I needed and she'd never make me let go.

What made you deserve someone who cares so much?

"You... you know that's not true," I uttered, remaining defiant beyond any reason or maturity. "I was a monster the day I was born. I simply can't comprehend why every one of you insist on showing me mercy and giving me the time of day. My only wish is that someone would've had the courage to slay such a repulsive creature from the start."

Her face immediately contorted into a frown, seemingly heartbroken at my rejection of her comfort.

There's the guilt again.

Her voice broke. "Remi, I... I stay here because I love you. "

For all the things I could've said, all the responses I could've came up with, it only took one word to crush her right then and there.

"Why?"

There was silence between us for maybe a solid minute, before she got up and walked back over to her books. "You should probably go feed your sister."

Oh, right... without Sakuya I had to do that directly. *Fantastic.*

I sighed and stood up, making my way out of the library. It made me feel better to hear her encouragement, but I really didn't want it. It made me ill in the deepest pit of my stomach, hearing any kind of positivity directed towards such a fowl, disgusting beast like me. I knew in my heart I simply shouldn't have started any of this, I shouldn't have gotten so many people entangled in my broken mess of a life.

I could take solace in the fact that unlike Sakuya she probably wouldn't leave, but I also knew she was only hurting herself by remaining with me.

I looked back at her briefly, wondering if I should attempt to mend what I had done.

I saw her angrily pouring a glass of wine, complaining about how it's "always about that damn maid."

I kept walking.

Isolation

I found myself curled up against my bed yet again, staring at the same blood red bedsheets I had for the last few hundred years. In my hands I felt the tattered remains of yet another stuffed bunny, its head sitting decapitated in front of what was left of its poor, fragile body. I... I'm not sure why I kept asking for more of them. I thought maybe the next time would be different, I thought maybe if I could prove I could stop myself from hurting an animal, sister would believe I could stop myself from hurting anyone else.

I..I still cried everytime, for the loss of the stuffed toys. I had realized by then that they weren't real, yet I still mourned them. They were the only thing willing to pay me any mind, after all.

I... I used to find it comforting. I used to take solace in the fact that I now had a safe place, where nobody would be mean to me ever again. They told me it'd only be a little while, and if I did really good I'd be able to go wherever I want and make new friends. Yet... it never changed, it was the same every time I woke up. The same purple bookshelf with maybe six actual books, the same little basket of broken toys, the same dim candle by my bedside...

It made me sick, looking at any of it. I yearned to simply wake up somewhere else, wake up somewhere *different*. But no matter how much I begged, to no one in particular, every day went exactly the same. Except... this day was different, this day was *worse*. I couldn't remember being served dinner the previous night, something that had never happened in my... so many years living in that room. I was alone throughout the morning, too, leaving me with a *horrible*, ravenous hunger. Everyone seemed very intent on making sure I didn't get too hungry before for some reason, yet there I was, neglected of any sort of sustenance.

My mind raced with the worst possibilities. Did something horrible happen? Did they all decide I wasn't worth it and leave me behind?

Were they intentionally leaving me to rot away? It was difficult for me to see any of them as unlikely scenarios, as much as I wanted to have more faith in sister and what little I knew of the other residents.

It wasn't long until I heard footsteps again. It might have been late, but it was reassuring, my mind being put at ease by the restored status quo. Perhaps the woman in the blue dress had simply fell asleep late? It would be out of character for her, but it wouldn't be that unusual.

Except... it wasn't the woman in the blue dress who came through my door.

It was none other than my big sister, Remilia.

She held in her hand the usual teacup full of blood, but her eyes were bloodshot, and she had a big frown on her face, seeming very nervous. I didn't really get why my sister seemed so sad, she was usually so confident and scary. Was she genuinely afraid to see me? Why was she, anyway? She placed the plate on my table in a rather crude fashion by her standards, resulting in a weird sounding *clank*.

I ran over and chugged the blood-tea, having been far too hungry to be concerned with my sister's surprise visit. Yet, as I found myself downing the glass, my eyes met with hers. I didn't know why, but it struck me how hurt and melancholy she looked, distantly looking into my eyes. I knew it wasn't my place, but...

"Sister, why are you so sad...?" I asked reluctantly.

As her appearance would suggest, her voice sounded weak and strained, which wasn't what I would usually expect from sister. "...It's nothing, Flandre, don't concern yourself. I suppose you should know that..." Her voice broke, and it almost sounded like she was going to cry. "... our maid, Sakuya, will no longer be providing services to us.

"Why is that...?" I questioned, curious. "Did something happen to the woman in the blue dress?"

"No," she said seemingly in an attempt to dismiss the conversation, "Sakuya simply did not want to be here anymore. I..will have to provide your meals directly from now on."

I wasn't... sure what else to say. I never knew the blue lady beyond anything as someone who would give me food, but it still made me sad to hear I probably wasn't going to see her again. That woman was one of the only people who ever really gave me the time of day.

"So..you're going to see me more often?" I said more optimistically, smiling.

She..frowned, an immediate look of guilt in her eyes. "Yes, I... I suppose you'll be seeing more of me than you have been."

I sighed, her tone crushing any sort of dream I could have of us having a good friendship again. Frustrated, I began to consider becoming defiant, and sought to build up the courage to actually question her. I really didn't want to waste this, and let myself sink into another different, but ultimately the same cycle.

"Big sister, I... why don't you want to see me more often? I know I'm bad sometimes but..." I held my head down, feeling a mix of self-shame and rejection. "Do you... just not like me anymore?"

Her face immediately looked hurt, making me wonder if I said anything bad. "Flandre, I'll always love you... you're my sister!"

"But, sister, it... it's so lonely down here. I can hardly remember what it's like outside. It's so boring down here, all by myself. Why do you always leave me here, all alone...?"

There was silence. I simply stared at her, feeling a mix of reluctant trust and betrayal. I wanted to believe sister had every reason to lock me up, and that it was me who was in the wrong for questioning her. But more and more as I went on, it became difficult to believe.

She spoke up again, taking on an understanding yet stern tone as she usually would, or at least as much as I could muster such a thing this time around. "Flandre, you... you're a danger to those around you, and to be frank, that's not really what I care about. But Gensokyo is very harsh to those who hurt others, and I don't know what would happen to you if you let your strength get the best of you."

"But..why don't you give me a chance?!" I cried. "Even if I'm dangerous, don't you think it'd be best for everyone if you could help me be better?"

She..sighed, looking down somberly. "Flandre, I..I don't trust them."

"What do you mean...?"

"Even if..even if I told them you were safe. Even if you *were* safe. Everyone in this godforsaken land fears that which is stronger than them, and they would hurt you no matter how kind you are to them."

I had heard similar explanations from my sister before, but they were always confusing. Why should I have been afraid of the residents of Gensokyo? Sure, I hadn't met many of them, but the few I talked to were always very nice to me. I always looked forward to seeing that blonde witch Marisa, even though sister always spoke lowly of her.

"I bet... I bet people would like me! I bet we'd get along just fine! And I bet *you're* stopping me from reaching that potential happiness!"

"Flandre, please!" She cried, in a more distressed, somber tone than I usually heard of her. "I can't risk it. I can't lose you... I can't lose you like I did her. I don't know what they'd do to you."

"But why won't you try?! Why won't you bother trying to help me?!" If you care about me so much I why don't you want me to be happy?!" I could feel my heart beating, my face heating up..and after missing breakfast, the gnaw of hunger hadn't entirely gone away. I couldn't stand the thought of being in this room any longer, it made sick to my

stomach to think of waking up to those god damn red bed sheets again.

Her head sunk, and she shook her head. "Flandre, I can't even help myself. I don't know what would make you okay, I don't know what would make anything okay. I don't want to expose you to the dangers of the world, I don't..want you to experience what I've experienced. "

"I don't care!" I cried, finding it hard to restrain myself from shouting now... it was scary. "That should be MY choice, not yours! I want to see the world, I want to make friends who will actually CARE about me! I bet Marisa or Reimu or anyone else wouldn't treat me like this!"

"What have they done for you that I haven't?"

"TALK TO ME! I'M TIRED OF YOU SHELVING ME LIKE I'M ONE OF YOUR MANY MISTAKES! I'M NOT WAITING FOR YOU TO LET ME OUT ANYMORE!"

She looked shocked, as I had never defied her like this before. Yet, infuriatingly, she still held her ground, managing to make it seem like she didn't even care as always. "This chat is over. I will be back with your breakfast, as always."

I couldn't stay in this room anymore. I couldn't do it. As every second passed by, I felt control of myself slipping from my hands. I tried my best to hold myself back, I didn't want to prove her right, but it was too late.

I lunged at my sister, slashing her across the chest and smashing her into the floor. Fear like I'd never seen from her before covered her face, but I didn't care. I didn't bother stopping myself, I knew it wasn't worth it.

Everything went red.

I layed across the nasty couch, resting my head in my lap. I tried my best to drown out my sister's screams and cries, but it was so difficult to ignore it. I was so tired, so scared, and yet I still couldn't find comfort in even the one person who had always been in my life. She just wouldn't stop screaming. I didn't want to be in this broken building I didn't even recognize, I just wanted to go home. All I wanted was to wake up from this nightmare, and go back to the way things were.

But I knew in my heart that home was gone. I knew we couldn't go back, and I knew it was unlikely anyone else would ever take us in again. I couldn't block it out anymore, I sobbed and sobbed, not caring anymore who heard it.

It took a bit, but my sister caught on and halted her rampage dead in her tracks. She looked at me with the deepest remorse I had ever seen out of her.

I spoke up, my voice strained..."Sister, it..it's not going to be okay this time, is it?"

I expected her to give me a huge lecture about how we're supposed to be better than that, to chastise me for being weak and tell me to do better.

But she didn't. Instead, she pulled me into a warm embrace and wiped off my tears.

"Flandre, I don't know what's going to happen. But I do know I'm going to fix this for you. Some day we're going to be safe and happy together, I promise."

I cried and cried in her arms..it was one of the few times I felt truly safe.

Family

I could hardly feel anything. The only prominent sensation was an agitation in the base of my hands, but otherwise I wasn't entirely sure what was happening. Yet, as consciousness began to return to me, a searing pain across my chest and stomach became more apparent. The pain only became worse as I became more and more awake, yet..I could not tend to it. When I tried to move my arms to do... *something* about it, my arms would simply not budge. The more I struggled, a deep soreness became apparent in my hands, and no matter how much I struggled, it was futile.

Having no choice but to simply bear the pain for the time being, I instead focused my efforts into figuring out what was going on, my eyes struggling to creak open. As my surroundings became apparent, I was surprised to see I didn't end up in some weird basement like I expected-but rather, it was the balcony of my home. That proved reassuring... until I kicked back my feet, and realized they did not hit the ground.

Whoever this fool was, it was apparent they had attempted to abduct me within the confines of my own damn mansion. At the very least, with a lack of foresight like that they'd make a nice, convenient meal that'd last a good few days once all of this nonsense was resolved.

It wasn't very long until I heard footsteps approaching the balcony. Not wanting to... lose the potential for a surprise attack, I lunged my legs forward repeatedly. I groaned more and more as I realized it probably wasn't going to work, even with as crude as their work seemed to be.

The attacker came closer and closer as I heard a heavy breathing that wasn't my own, and I struggled more and more in response. But it wasn't long until I simply gave up, as I didn't want to let go of my pride in front of whatever sort of antagonist this was.

Yet... as I saw their face, my eyes widened as it came to me that the reality of the situation was far worse than anything I could've ever envisioned.

Standing in front of me, apparently responsible for this entire debacle, was *my own sister*. Her clothes looked ragged, blood was splattered across both her torso and her face, but her expression was one not of malice-but clearly one of a childish anger, her cheeks puffed up in a bizarre sort of pout, yet still having a very powerful vengeance in her eyes. It was quite a surreal thing to see.

I could feel my heart beat faster as she stomped towards me. It was a feeling that I... hadn't had to deal with in a long time.

"Hello, sister," she spoke up at me, in an attempt to be elegant that would be almost adorable in any other situation. "I can see... you aren't that happy to see me."

"What the hell are you doing?!" I barked at her, flailing my legs frantically. "What makes you think you can just... tie me up to the light of my balcony like I'm an animal?!"

"Well..honestly, I just wanted to leave! I really did..but then I realized I'd never truly be free as long as you were here. As long as you existed in this world, you'd find me and lock me up again... so I'm sticking up for myself."

My tone became more sympathetic hearing this explanation, as, well... I knew what lead to this was my own failures. "Flandre, I... I only planned on keeping you in there until you were ready to leave. It was never supposed to... be forever."

"Stop SAYING that to me!" She yelled angrily. "That's a damn bloody LIE! You kept telling me that every single time I complained about it, but the day where I'm somehow recovered enough to deserve freedom never EVER comes!"

It was..unsettling about how introspective my sister seemed to be, despite her naivety and relative youth. I thought maybe she would think more highly of me, not be painfully aware of the character flaws that would be blatantly obvious to any experienced person with a naked eye.

It was impressive nonetheless. Be it any other context, I'd shed a tear for how much she'd grown up in the last few hundred years.

"And besides, you barely did anything to fix me anyway! Did you think being alone would magically make everything better for me?!"

"Flandre, I... I tried. I wasn't cut out for trying to save someone like you, I couldn't even fix me.

"Tried?! When?! It's been like, at least a hundred years since you even got off your ass to do anything for me! You had to use your servants to so much as *feed* me, you couldn't even make the time to provide for me! What's wrong with you?!"

There was silence for a good while. I wanted to say something more but there really was nothing I could do to refute that point of her's, I was defeated. I distantly looked at the night sky and began to comprehend that the sun was slowly creeping into the atmosphere. It became fairly obvious exactly what her plan was. I wasn't... sure if it was because she was too afraid to do it herself, or because she wanted me to face a slow and painful end, but either way..it was insidious. A somewhat amateur revenge in many respects, but it was *beautifully* insidious.

I emitted a dry chuckle looking down at her, a bitter sense of pride marked by a smile on my face. "Flandre, I'm *proud* of you! Seriously!"

"Um... what..?"

"I didn't expect anyone to be able to knock me off my pedestal, I thought I was infallible. Yet, if someone were to do it, I expected

some kind of renowned hero, a knight in shining armor coming to save their stupid village. Yet... I could've never known my maker was right in front of me. To strike me when I least expected it and leave me to rot... Flandre, it was by no means perfect but I can't describe how impressed I am that you got this far at all! It'd only take a few years for you to take my place as the vampire everyone should be afraid of, I bet!"

"But..." She looked down, apparently saddened by the bittersweet praise. "I never wanted people to be afraid of me..."

"Ohohoho, you think you get to choose?" They'd hate us no matter what we do, that's why it's best to take advantage of their loathing!"

"Is that what you think?" She responded, looking down. "Do you think they hate you just because you're a vampire? Is that really what you think?"

I... I hadn't expected that response.

"Of... of course," I responded, rolling my eyes. "They've always hated people like us."

"They don't hate you because you're a vampire, sister. They hate you because you're a monster."

I... I hate when people are right.

"And that's why... that's why I..that's why I hate you too!"

I simply sighed. "Me too, Flandre. Me too."

Her face contorted in a clear mix of sadness and anger at my response, but she gave up. She simply walked right back through the balcony door, not saying another word. Part of me wanted to beg her to come back, but I knew it'd be foolish.

I looked back at the sun, which was getting closer and closer to finally rearing it's ugly head. I smiled distantly at it's presence,

welcoming it with open arms.

It was finally over.

I had ran back to my home as soon as I could, already feeling out of breath by the time I reached the door handle. I saw my worst fears confirmed as I walked through the door.

There were knives everywhere, broken furniture and glass covering the living room, which now looked like a shell of it's former self. I immediately ran to Flandre's crib as I navigated through the array of shards of glass and various weapons. The poor thing was shaking and crying as I expected.

Attached to the crib, I found a note, the words seemingly blurred by water.

"Take care of her, Remilia, I know you can. I'm sorry."

Childhood

I awoke to..darkness. I panicked, trying to feel up everything I could get my then tiny hands on, but it was futile to gain any awareness of my surroundings. I could feel my hear beat faster as I bawled my eyes out, screaming for every remotely significant family member I could think of. My mother, my father, my siblings...? It's funny, I don't think I could remember their names if I tried. I scraped the unidentifiable black walls with my fingernails, trying my best to make *some* sort of escape. Yet, no matter how much I screamed and how much I wailed, it seemed my plea was much like that of a tree deep in the woods-heard by no one and thus, answered by no one.

Though, eventually, it had *seemed* some kind soul had taken pity on me, as the black wall in front of me soon turned into a bright, endless light, forming a sort of portal to a place unfamiliar to me. I scooted backwards instinctively, a more subdued form of fear and confusion overcoming my previous feelings. I would have stationed myself there all day, but several strange voices began to become prominent, pressuring me into abandoning what little safety I had.

Having little other options and being too young for any kind of rationality, I climbed out of the enclosure slowly. I was instantly met with gold-plated walls, a bright, vibrant chandelier blurring my vision, and many figures I did not recognize. Their clothes were bright and colorful, adorned with expensive jewelry I could probably never hope to get my hands on. As I stepped onto the bright marble flooring, it came to my attention that all of these strange individuals seemed to be focused on *me* specifically.

I stumbled backwards and fell back into the ground, holding my head in my hands and doing what I could to avoid the unwanted attention. Voices around me mumbled and whispered incessantly, and every part of me begged for one of my guardians to appear in the crowd and cradle me. But just like before, no such thing happened, and I was trapped once again. I reluctantly moved my feet forward once

one of the figures silently pressured me into doing so, keeping my head down all the while. A strained, aged, yet triumphant and arrogant voice raised above all the others, jerking another sobbing fit out of my naive mind.

"It is in great pleasure that I may announce the recruitment of yet another child of purity! This little girl was graciously bartered from her family, and will be removing the world of what shouldn't exist before we know it..."

"Hey, Dai, get over here! I think she's starting to wake up!"

"..Be quiet, Cirno! She might be tired!"

I was immediately awoken to a horrible chill engulfing the back of my body, my arms and legs being soaked in freezing water. Regaining my consciousness, I launched my torso out of the mush, grumpily shaking the unexpected snow off of my arms.

Immediately, blue hair and innocent cyan eyes were shoved right into my face, her cold breathing running down my neck. "You're that maid from the mansion! I saw you looking all sad so I made you a comfy bed in MY house! Why were you sleeping outside anyway, huh?"

I groaned, an immense pain in my back and a mix of sickness and hunger in my stomach indicating the fairy's failure. "...I appreciate the effort, but.." Of course, the naive creature didn't exactly have much of an understanding of what was an ideal condition for a human being. Sighing, I stood up, and instantly found my head crashing into the roof of the bizarre snow-made structure, showering me in cold water.

I simply sighed. *This* was what I had abandoned my master for. What the hell was I doing? Shouldn't I have learned by that point that complacency always works better?

"No, but seriously, what're you doing out here?" The childish fairy questioned rather rudely. "I know you're supposed to live in that big fancy mansion over there," she observed as she idly stuck her tongue out, "so what gives?"

I was a little bit miffed she asking *me* for an explanation, considering I was the one who was practically kidnapped in my sleep. "I experienced... *conflict* with my former management. It's really none of your business, and I think it disrespectful to ask."

"Wow, okay, geez," She shrugged. "Wanna play in the snow with us?"

"It's the middle of summer."

"Yeah, so?"

I simply sighed and walked out with the two fairies, wanting to at least get out of that hovel. The morning sun shined brightly, and as it so happens, she was turning water into snowballs and exchanging them with her friend. I sat cross-legged on the warm summer ground and decided to observe them. It was a monotonous activity in my mind, the two simply hurling the balls at each other in repeat. Yet, the two found plenty of joy in the repetitive experience, often losing their breathe and having to stop just to giggle like a newborn baby. It was so... alien.

Then, Cirno dropped one of the things next to me, encouraging me to hop into their little game. I simply stared at it like it was from another planet, rotating in my hand to try to decipher it's purpose. I'm not an idiot, I knew what a damn snowball was; I just... couldn't comprehend these games. Freezing water trickled down my hands, as it was just too hot to properly sustain these things.

"You're supposed to throw it at us, dummy!"

Two sets of childish eyes stared at me with expectation. I was always one to follow commands, so... I hurled it at her.

They giggled, and soon I found a series of icy spheres smashing against my face. Now soaking wet, I can't see I felt I'd accomplished much. But the children were relentless in trying to instigate me, and it wasn't very long until my entire dress soaked.

"Come on! You can't just wimp out on me like that!"

More cold water.

"You know you wanna!"

Ugh.

The freezing water kept coming and coming, to a point where I was pretty sure I'd wake up with a cold the next day. My hands clamped up and my heart pulsed, not sure how much longer I could take this abuse.

Another one hit particularly hard and that did it. I spun my arm around and *launched* one of the snowballs directly into Cirno's face, slapping her right onto the ground. Her green-haired friend was immediately stricken with fear, and cursed me out for hurting her-but that blue fairy simply sat up and let the ice cold water leak out of her mouth. "Nice!"

I kept playing their petty snowball game, primarily motivated by spite. However, after a few minutes I soon found myself in a rhythm, as if I were genuinely motivated to succeed over them in this children's game. More and more I began to find a certain peace in myself I'd never quite felt before, giggling and laughing with them as I continued to ruin my already doomed dress. Eventually we were all out of breathe, and I felt a tinge of embarrassment owed to my behavior-though I couldn't deny the happiness it had brought me.

Much to my surprise, I soon found the bright blue fae... wrapping her arms around my legs. "You're actually super cool, miss maid!"

I don't know what it was, but..I began sobbing. This innocence, these feelings I had never felt before... It was all too much to bear. I scooped the child into my arms and hugged them as hard as I could, wanting to protect them from all of the cruelty the world had to offer at that moment. "Why're you so sad, miss?" She wondered aloud. "We were having so much fun!"

I..I let her down and simply walked off. They both called out my name in protest, but I simply couldn't stand any of it anymore. I still needed to find food and shelter, and I didn't want to drag such an innocent face into those issues. I wouldn't dare take away something I never had.

Regret

It was for hours that I swung back and fourth at the highpoint of my once triumphant mansion. The anger of the sun enveloped every inch of my skin, and every part of me felt sick. I wasn't sure at that point whether I was the victim of an attempt at murder, or if I was left there for the sake of torture. Admittedly, being around so few of my own kind made by own biology a blur in my head; It was hard to discern how long it would take for the sunlight to erase me completely, if it ever would. Of course, that doesn't mean the flaming heat across every part of me wasn't any less unbearable, and the fear in my heart only heightened after realizing there would be no relief.

One may see my continued survival as a respite, but they'd be absolute foolish. I had already readied myself for a fitting end, removed from this world by the problems I had created and finally able to rest. It came as little surprise that my desires were merely wishful thinking, and the beast that was me would have no choice but to persist. Perhaps my dear sister would leave me there for days upon months, just to rub salt in the wound before finally finishing off whatever morsel of a person is left when she returns. I had to wonder how many people had felt similar feelings of helplessness as a result of my actions. Indeed, it was easy to imagine that even the fools who kept themselves close to me had felt themselves stuck to a venus fly trap, just waiting for the monster they slept near to devour them whole.

That Sakuya... she was always a person that perplexed me, even when we were at our closest. No matter how many times I demanded her true feelings I only got the same stock responses. She demanded she was perfectly happy in her place, but unfortunately I'm far more inquisitive than that. I could see her longing for something better, her longing for freedom that she could never pursue out of a blind sense of loyalty and dedication. I could only imagine the immense feeling of freedom and relief in her heart

the moment she finally worked up the nerve to break out of her gilded cage. I would have let her go anytime she pleased, but I'm sure that isn't how she saw it. And can I blame her?

All I could do was hope that where she ended up, she could find some kind of comfort, a new purpose. But alas, I knew very well the harshness of the world, even in regards to a peaceful land like Gensokyo.

Of course, as fate often goes, it wasn't long before I turned even everyone else I sheltered with against me as well. I loved Patchouli dearly and wouldn't have made it to where I am without her, but I suppose we drifted apart more and more after we moved into the mansion. Maybe it's because she preferred to isolate herself in that library of hers, and maybe it's because I myself was more and more unable to maintain any kind of relationship with anyone. The fact that she still cared for me to some extent after everything that happened was what I felt the most guilty about, knowing she'd inevitably be disappointed.

And then there was my poor, poor sister-The woman I was in the position to save, but never could. Despite the thinly-veiled excuse I portrayed, I kept her in that room because I knew the powers of this land would never accept her. I knew how they rejected and hated that which was stronger than them, and I knew it wouldn't be long before she was on burned at the stake, what with even me already being on thin ice. Of course, it was that paranoia of mine that ended up breaking her down until she couldn't take it anymore. It was no surprise I couldn't even fulfill the promise I made to my mother...

I felt trickles of liquid splashing against my burning face. I couldn't handle the pain, the fear, and the regret anymore. I wanted to go home.

Yet, as I could feel my hands attempting to turn into fists, the immense sadness and regret I felt soon boiled into rage. I saw the hundreds and hundreds of different vampire hunters, despicable priests, and tyrants who all sought to end me, laughing and jeering at

the pitiful state I found myself in. They would step on my face, piss in my mouth, boast about how far I had fallen and smash their high boots into my stomach until I couldn't breathe anymore. And then they'd drape whatever kind of worthless corpse remained over their wall, a trophy to commemorate the day.

I imagined it easily in my head- *that damn gap-witch laughing hysterically after my body is discovered against the side of the back wall, that tengu writing about what a horrible presence, that shrine maiden and the witch scoffing at what a tedium I was. That Buddhist talking about how despite her preaching of peace, she's glad vampires are something Gensokyo is finally rid of.* I couldn't begin to stand it, the scenario I imagined in my head of all the hypocritical residents of that god-forsaken land mocking and celebrating my passing.

I furiously swung my legs into the air over and over again, so consumed by anger that I could barely see straight. I flapped the wings behind me vigorously, clinging to the feelings of victory I was teased with every time the rope was just a little bit looser. I exerted every possible bit of energy I had left into tearing out of my containment, and eventually I felt the fruits of my labor-the light I was tied to slammed against the ground and broke, splattering broken glass all across the balcony. Now, scrambling with only my legs in usable condition, I ran into the house and did my best to find whatever could be sharp enough to cut my chains.

I dreaded it, but... I knew exactly where I needed to go. Her room was a disaster, seldom entered since that fateful night and littered with abandoned cleaning supplies, dresses, and whatever else she decided wasn't important enough to leave in a hurry with. I rarely ever entered the room directly, so I must've looked like a fool trying to browse the abandoned room of its contents without the aid of my arms. After what felt like hours, my efforts were rewarded and I managed to discover a small, now sad looking bag, that yielded the shining weapon I needed after being hastily kicked across the floor.

I let my body sink to the ground, and limped as close as I could to the fruit of my labor, cringing as I felt the tang of metal cling against my teeth. I stood back up and, with very little left to loose, I strenuously craned my head as far as I possibly could my attempt to reach the godforsaken rope. Finally lunging my head forward, feeling the rope fall into two pieces gave me a feeling of satisfaction I hadn't felt in years, hearkening back to the peak of my glory days.

It was short lived, however, as immediately after my victory I *collapsed* onto the ground. My sadness, my anger and everything in between began to fade for just that moment as the forces of exhaustion were swept over me. The tears began to well up again, and a disgusting combination of tears and snot slapped against my face, as I felt my persona slipping and the anguish and exhaustion I felt splattered out of me all at once. There was a rampaging sister I needed to save and a mage I needed to make amends with, but those things simply had to wait. For the time, I'd merely have to cling to the minuscule victory of survival.